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TWO CRITICISMS.

I.

DR. RITTER'S TEXT-BOOK OF REFORMED JUDAISM.¹

THE problem of religious education in all its many-sided difficulty is probably presenting itself to an ever-increasing number of English Jews. Only those who (should one add happily or unhappily?) have never sipped of the waters of Philosophy, and are ignorant of all the results and suspicions of "historical" or "higher" criticism, can still justly deprecate the inclusion of religious education among the list of social problems that demand inquiry and solution. To them the old path is still open: the way, unbeset by thicket or bramble, is clear and easy, the goal to which it leads at once beautiful and sure. But those who have eaten of the tree of knowledge can no longer follow in the old tracks with a pure conscience and a simple faith. For though it be indeed the tree of knowledge of which they have eaten, it has yet seemed in other moods to be a tree of doubt, whereof to eat has brought them trouble and fear. They have grasped their new moorings, but only after a stormy voyage, in which, perhaps for long, they drifted aimlessly, uncertain of the end. Can they not save a succeeding generation from the pain of doubt and indecision? Descending from generalities to particulars, we all know how any scheme of "Reformed Judaism" is attacked by opponents of various schools. It is a faith, they tell us, possible for a few individuals whom the unconscious force of heredity, together with an inconsistent half-heartedness in speculation, has prevented from realizing the sandy foundations of the half-way house wherein they dwell: it is an impossible faith for a whole community, and above all it is an *unteachable* faith, which cannot be presented in a definite shape and body before the mental eye of youth. And reformers are surely quite honest enough to feel that these attacks are not without their truth. Thus Dr. Ritter's little *Religions—Lehrbuch nach den Grundsätzen der jüdischen Reformgemeinde zu Berlin*, will possess a deep interest both to friend and foe. For Dr. Ritter

¹ *Religions—Lehrbuch nach den Grundsätzen der jüdischen Reformgemeinde zu Berlin*, verfasst von Dr. I. H. Ritter, Prediger derselben, Berlin, 1889.

is the successor of the great reformer, Samuel Holdheim, and in his congregation the violation of the dietary laws is openly taught, the worshipper upon entering the synagogue bares his head, and the service is conducted almost exclusively in the vernacular. Can Dr. Ritter, then, still teach the youth of his *Gemeinde* a definitely Jewish religion?

The criticisms that are to follow will show that I do not think Dr. Ritter's book is by any means entirely satisfactory. But, nevertheless, the unprejudiced reader (if, which is unlikely, such a delightful being exists upon the earth's surface) will, or rather would, I fancy, allow that we do find here clearly taught and explained a pure and simple, but not therefore vague and indefinite, development of *Judaism*, of the Jewish religion.

Where Dr. Ritter fails is in giving no sufficient exposition of the proper relation of *this* Judaism to the Judaisms of the Bible, and to the Bible itself. His book, moreover, suffers by being, in one important respect, "neither flesh, nor fowl, nor good red herring." It is often too advanced in treatment and expression for children; it is often, again, not full or detailed enough for adolescents (say from seventeen till twenty-one, a very important age) and for teachers. I earnestly hope that Dr. Ritter will before long issue a considerably enlarged edition for these two classes of readers.

The book consists of sixty-seven small pages, and is divided into ten chapters, which treat of the following subjects: (1) of God; (2) of Man; (3) Faith and Duties; (4) the Festivals; (5) the Minor Religious Festivals; (6) Worship and Prayer; (7) the Sanctification of God; (8) our Religion and its Development; (9) of Miracles and Revelation; (10) the Messianic age, Israel's mission, and humanity's hope. Of these chapters, that on Faith and Duties occupies twenty-eight pages. The remaining nine have only thirty-nine pages between them. It will thus be seen that the huge subjects indicated in the last three sections can only receive a very short and inadequate treatment.

Most of the statements in the various chapters are substantiated by short extracts from Scripture. These are taken from all the books of the Bible indifferently, and although such a procedure is open to the objection that it implies that the whole Bible teaches one uniform and articulated body of doctrine, that is, perhaps, unavoidable in a work of this kind. At any rate, all will allow that the selections have been made with very great skill and care.

In chapter i. God is defined as "the creator (*Urheber*) of the world, a sole, single (*einziges*), and eternal Being, the father of all mankind." In this definition, and in the attributes of God that follow, we miss any allusion to the omnipresence and spiritual nature of the Supreme Being. And should not the *רוּחַ הקָדוֹשׁ* find a place in a *Lehrbuch der JÜDISCHEN Religion*? Is the prayer of the fifty-first Psalm, "Take not thy Holy Spirit

from me" (cf. Isaiah lxiii.), to be ignored because of the important part assigned to the Spirit in the dogmas of Christianity? More than once Dr. Ritter wisely alludes to God's rule and revelation in history, but the method of God's providence in its details is surely hidden from human understanding, so that, whatever the Biblical opinion may be, it is untrue to our present religious consciousness, to say "God deals recompense to every one in due time (and often in a surprising manner) according to his deserts."

Quoting the well-known verse of Proverbs (iii. 12), our author lays stress on the divine chastisement which is based upon divine love. But since Prov. iii. 12 is a tolerably isolated thought among the Scriptural writers, he ought to have gone a step further, and, utilizing a teacher whose measure of inspiration was far greater than the wise man of Proverbs, touched upon the self-sacrifice of the higher for the lower, of the part for the whole (Isaiah liii.).

Man (chapter ii.), according to Dr. Ritter, is distinguished from all other creatures in that God has given him reason, freedom of the will, and conscience. The "image of God" in which man was created, is explained to mean that God has given him spiritual gifts, through which he may become like God. "Like God" in a twofold manner: first by his rule over nature, secondly by his moral capacity.

The (comparatively) long chapter on "Faith and Duties" is grouped round an exposition of the Ten Commandments. We are told that "the pure faith about God, and the main duties of man are taught in the ten words of Sinai." But nothing is said as to the Author, whether mediate or immediate, of these words, nor as to the occasion upon which they were delivered. Considering the enormous importance of the Decalogue, and the central position it has so long occupied in the Jewish religion, we are surely entitled to ask, whether the Principles of the *Reformgemeinde* include a belief that it was really God himself, or at least a divine voice specially created for the occasion (Maimonides: "Moreh Nebuchim" I. 65), who spoke these ten words, or whether "Reformed Judaism," in this Dr. Ritter's exposition of it, bases the supreme value that is assigned to them upon other and less external grounds.

Round the ten words, however, the various elements of religion and morality are very skilfully clustered. Thus the folly of superstition is included under the second word, the nobility of friendship under the seventh, the value of property under the eighth.¹

¹ Under the sixth word we are told that we must not only content ourselves with not destroying human life, but we must actively seek to maintain and promote its well being. Very proper. But one of Dr. Ritter's applications sounds strangely. "If e.g. you could succour a drowning person *without any danger to yourself*, and forbear to do so, your guilt is very near to the guilt of actual murder." Cannot the demands of Ethics go further than this?

But in this chapter on *Glaube und Pflichten* there is one notable omission. Nothing is said respecting the hope which religion offers of a life beyond the grave. Only on the last page of the book is there any allusion to the doctrine of a future life, and on that page it is (perhaps purposely?) left unclear whether it is only the good which man has wrought, or his own spiritual personality as well, for which immortality is claimed. But the immortality of the soul is too important a subject to be thus relegated to the obscurity of a final sentence in a work which is elsewhere so excellently clear. With so many of the very noblest writers of the Bible to contradict him, no one would be justified in denying that man the right to the title of Jew, who was able to believe in God's supreme justice and love, without the postulate of a future life. But Dr. Ritter in another edition of his book must tell us his position more plainly.

In the ninth chapter, on the Festivals, we tread specifically Jewish ground. It is a successful and interesting section. In the opening paragraph Dr. Ritter shows how a certain amount of criticism may be brought in even to a small schoolbook. Thus he tells us that "the oldest festivals seem originally to have been Nature-festivals, celebrating particular seasons, or the transition from one season to another." So Passover, originally a spring festival, was afterwards connected with the deliverance from Egypt. Whether the command to eat unleavened bread during Passover is still regarded as obligatory by the *Reformgemeinde*, Dr. Ritter does not inform us. He explains that the second name of the Passover, חנוכה, is derived from the outward symbol (*Sinnbild*) of the festival, which consisted in the exclusive use of unleavened bread during the whole of its seven days' course. A far-fetched Midrashic explanation of the symbolism is also added, but not a word as to the propriety of its maintenance or abolition at the present time. The ethical importance of the Day of Memorial and the Day of Atonement are well explained. The various names of the former receive ethical interpretations. Thus יום הדין turns out to be the day of *self-judgment*, the day on which we, vividly calling to mind the judgment of God, are impelled to submit our dispositions and our deeds to a searching examination. Whether "Reformed Jews" have still to fast upon the Atonement Day we are not informed.

Besides the four main festivals, Dr. Ritter recognises three minor ones: Purim, the 9th day of Ab, and Chanukah. Why an unhistorical festival like Purim is linked to two such supremely important events as the destruction of Jerusalem and the victory of the Maccabees is very hard to see. But Dr. Ritter's treatment of the 9th day of Ab is eminently clear, straightforward and satisfactory, and I am glad to quote it in full. The day, he tells us, used to be celebrated with the deepest sorrow so long as the destruction of the Jewish capital and

its temple was regarded as the greatest shock to the stability of the Jewish religion.

We now look back with affectionate piety upon the double destruction of the temple, because the direst sorrows to our ancestors were connected with it ; but we recognise that the religious purification of the Jews and their unshaken fidelity to God and his doctrine, were brought about by the captivity at Babylon. And, moreover, we acknowledge that it is only from the final destruction of the temple that Judaism's higher historic mission, now at last freed from every outward support, takes its rise. We are, therefore, grateful to Providence, who has even turned the woes of our dear ancestors into a blessing for their descendants and the world at large.

One of Dr. Ritter's most successful chapters is that on Prayer and Public Worship. The "*Gottesdienst*" of the old Israelites once consisted of sacrifices. But prayer is higher than sacrifice ; for in sacrifice a present is offered to a deity who needs no gifts, while prayer has for its object the devotion of our whole will to God. May we in prayer ask God to grant us any particular boon ? Dr. Ritter answers with sufficient clearness—no. This is a subject which does indeed contribute to form "the deep gulf" which, according to Professor Delitzsch, separates "the old theology from the new." ("Expositor," January, 1889, p. 51.) But prayer is not destroyed because a belief in miraculous interpositions has passed away. The highest prayer, as Dr. Ritter truly says, is that which in the noble words of a great English teacher "even in extremity of danger or suffering seeks only the fulfilment of God's will."

Rabbi Gamliel was no "rationalist," but even those who must be stigmatised by that curious epithet of reproach may adopt his great aphorism with a complete sincerity. And so our author quotes the noble adage, "Make his will to be thy will, that he may make thy will to be his will," and explains it to mean, that he who has made God's will his, will be able to recognise in the results of God's will the expression of his own.

Dr. Ritter is quite explicit as to the use of the vernacular in all prayer, whether public or private. He is also quite logical.

We say our prayers in our mother tongue (like our ancestors), because the yearnings of the heart and the deepest needs of the soul can only be expressed in our own language. For our ancestors this mother tongue was Hebrew, for us it is the language of that particular fatherland in which we have been born and bred. Only the proclamation of the highest religious truths, the watch-words of Judaism, do we also utter aloud in the tongue of our fathers in which we have received them ; this we do to show their origin and our agreement with them, in spite of all the other changes of time. These special watch-words are the confessions of God's unity and holiness ; they are our motto, just as Prussians have a Latin motto, *Suum cuique*, though they are Germans.

The three last sections of the *Lehrbuch* suffer from what seems to me unnecessary compression. The vast subjects with which they deal can hardly be touched upon without some resulting uncleanness in thirteen small pages. To "Our Religion and

its Development," for instance, are assigned five pages. They begin with the thoroughly prophetic statement that "our religion is destined for all mankind without distinction." Israel was "chosen" by God simply and solely that it might thereby work for the religious well-being of humanity at large. But by "our religion," Dr. Ritter understands only the doctrine of the one, spiritual and holy God, and the recognition of morality as God's immutable law. Israel's hope is that all nations in days to come will accept these two dogmas, but in no wise that they will all conform to the same outward religious forms. (Here it will be noticed that the ordinary orthodox view is at one with the radical reformer's.) Forms, our author tells us, are liable to change, and indeed have also in Israel been subject to change "*von jeher*." After which remark Dr. Ritter suddenly leaps forward to Moses Mendelssohn. A short but graphic account is given of his reforms, and then in the next paragraph we learn that the reform movement reached its culmination (*Gipfelfunkt*), when in the year 1845 the famous Berlin *Genossenschaft*, after proclaiming its principles in a short and brilliant manifesto, founded the *Reformgemeinde* over which Dr. Ritter now presides.

After quoting the central paragraph of this manifesto, Dr. Ritter proceeds to show what the principles of reform involve. Among its applications are prayer in the vernacular, with uncovered head, "according to the custom of our fatherland," the removal and abandonment of every national and political element, such as the dietary laws, the *Tefillin*, the "Zizit," etc. Most trenchant application of all, which, I believe, Holdheim himself lived to regret, is the transference of the Sabbath to a day on which its "sanctifying objects and results may be enjoyed by the *whole* community."

This wholesale sacrifice of the national elements in Judaism is a logical deduction from the entirely different conceptions formed by Orthodoxy and Reform respectively as to Israel's future. Orthodoxy believes in a personal Messiah and in a renewal of the national life in Palestine. Reform has abandoned both these articles of faith, and clings only to a belief in the slow but real progress of mankind in knowledge, goodness and pure religion. To contribute its share to this progress is the mission of Israel. And thus our author lays down the doctrine :—

In olden days Israel's mission consisted in forming a kingdom of God in his own land, rigidly separated and apart from the neighbouring idolators. But now, when heathenism through the ultimate agency of our religion has been overcome, our duty is both larger and different. In close combination with those civilised people among whom God's will has scattered us, we must proclaim and practise his doctrine (*Lehre*) in its most perfect and unsullied purity; we must take an active part in the general purposes of the nations, forming as it were a link of union and connection between them. We must seek to promote the mutual intercourse of peace, and the interchange of social morality. We must prove our fidelity to our religion by that pure

service of man that is given in the love of God, by ready self-sacrifice and devotion for the well-being of mankind. As the Jews in their own land had to wage war against idolatry, so now scattered throughout the earth they must promote the destruction of delusion and error, coarseness and licentiousness, and help forward the universal praise and imitation of God as the only source of justice and of love. (P. 66.)

If, then, this is the religious programme of reformed Judaism, in what relation does it stand to the ancient Scriptures? Does it attempt, like orthodoxy, to find every article of its faith in the Bible? Must the propriety, *e.g.*, of the modern abandonment of the dietary laws be based upon a scriptural passage as orthodoxy finds its dogma of a Divine Oral Law enshrined within the Pentateuch? Again, what views are taken by reformed Judaism as to Inspiration? Is it verbal or general? Is the Pentateuch of Mosaic origin, or is the unanimous verdict of criticism accepted by the Berlin *Reformgemeinde*? All these questions must be honestly met and honestly answered, but Dr. Ritter leaves us in almost entire ignorance of what the youth of reform is to be taught upon these grave issues. All we get from him is a short chapter upon "Miracle and Revelation"—a chapter, which it must candidly be confessed, is far the weakest in the whole book. Dr. Ritter gives the following most strange and unhistorical definition of a miracle.

By the miracles spoken of in the Bible, we understand not any departure from the realms of natural law (*die Sphäre des Naturgemäßen*), but the unexpected and startling agreement of earthly fortunes and events with the justice demanded by reason.

On the strength of this definition he implies that the Biblical miracles are to be regarded merely as allegories—poetic veils through which the higher, ethical meaning has to be elicited. And then, as an example, follows an explanation of Joshua's sun and moon miracle, an explanation which cannot bear for a moment the inspection of criticism.

It is really surprising in a book written by the translator of Buckle to come across antiquated rationalism of this kind. Still more unsatisfactory is the treatment of revelation. Indeed, no candid reader will be able to gather whether our author supposes that anything supernatural happened to the Israelites at Sinai or not. Between the lines we may, I fancy, suspect that Dr. Ritter does not believe in the literal truth of the thunders and lightnings and the audible voice of God, but that he does not like to say so. Yet even for young persons the method of evasion is of perilous advantage. To ignore the ethical difficulty in the Second Commandment, or the theoretical difficulty respecting the sanction for the Sabbatical observance in the Fourth (according to the Exodus version) may lead hereafter to a religious revolt far wider than a more honest, though a less usual, method of pedagogic exegesis would probably have caused.

I have spoken the more openly upon what seem to me the

defects in Dr. Ritter's book, because I write not as a foe, but as a friend. Without by any means agreeing with all that Holdheim said, or with all that the Berlin *Reformgemeinde* has done, it is with the movement in which he took so leading a part that I feel the deepest and closest spiritual kinship. And though Dr. Ritter's little book needs here and there correction and amplification, it does present us with the outlines of a simple, pure and Jewish religion. Reformed Judaism is not without its difficulties ; but at all events it builds up its creed upon a less sandy foundation than the authenticity and verbal accuracy of a particular book. The results of Pentateuchal criticism cannot affect it. However difficult, therefore, it may be to fully establish our own position, our orthodox friends and brothers are in that respect, to our thinking, far worse off than ourselves. We do not despair of Judaism, however great may be the modifications that in the inexorable future may lie before it. Not without God's will have been its travailings in our own century. *הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר וְלֹא אָלֵיד יָמֶר ?*

II.

PROFESSOR CHEYNE AND THE JEWS.

Professor Cheyne's most useful little book on Jeremiah is worthy of detailed criticism from more than one point of view and for divers reasons. Here, however, I only desire to discuss a single page of it, that namely which deals with the "perennial" and the "greatest" tragedy in Israel's history (p. 100). That tragedy consist in Israel's "ignorant unbelief," in its neglect of "its highest honour and grandest privilege ;" in other words, in its rejection of Jesus, the Messiah. Professor Cheyne invites the reader to consider the few words upon this large subject in his "Jeremiah" in connection with his article "The Jews and the Gospel," in the Expositor for 1885, p. 401-418. (The article is a reproduction of a university sermon on the Jewish Interpretation of Prophecy, preached at St. Mary's, Oxford, on March 15th, 1885). In this essay "the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, *either with or without orthodoxy*," (the italics are mine) is declared to be "the only complete remedy for Israel's troubles." Moreover (and here is the point which specially interests the present writer) Reform Judaism is urged to at least complete "its meagre, because predominantly negative" character, by "the recognition of the central importance of the person of Jesus and of the New Testament."

In spite of certain somewhat dubious words in his Jeremiah, I do not for a moment believe that Professor Cheyne is in any kind of sympathy with the miserable and immoral conversionary